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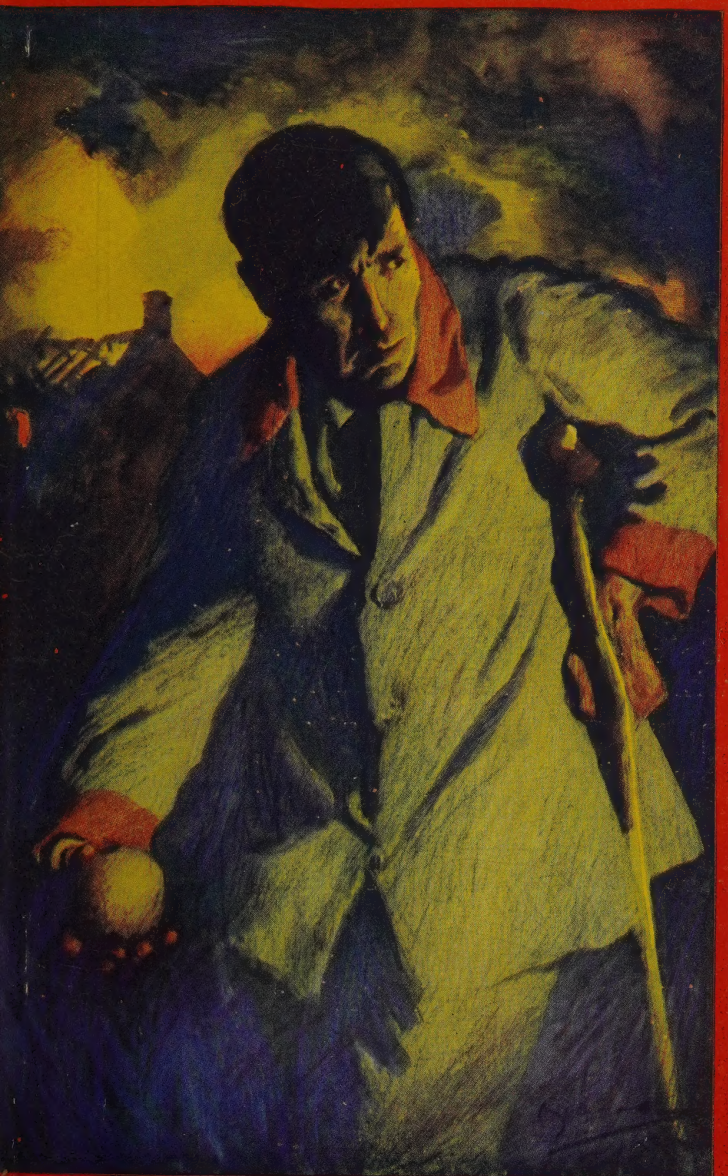

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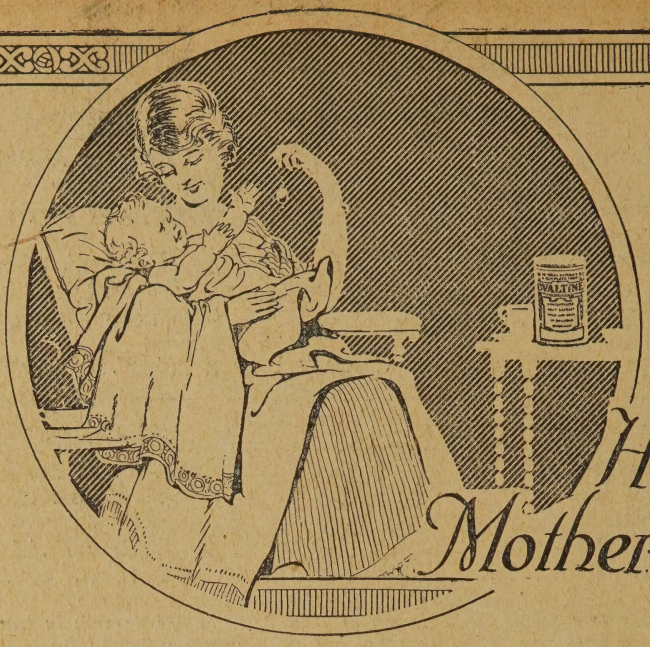

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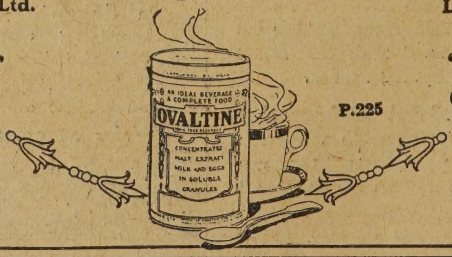

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A Friend of the Family

By Rudyard Kipling

"'. . . The next thing we saw . . . was Margetts' house with a bomb-hole in the roof and the rafters leanin' sideways like—like they always lean on such occasions. So we ran there, and the first thing we met was Margetts in his split-tailed nightie callin' on his mother and damnin' his wife. A man always does that when he's cross. Have you noticed? Mrs. Margetts was in her nightie too, remindin' Margetts that he hadn't completed his rick insurance. An' that's a woman's lovin' care all over'"

THERE had been rather a long sitting at Lodge "Faith and Works," 5836 E.C.,* that warm April night in '19. Three initiations and two raisings, each conducted with the spaciousness and particularity that our Lodge prides itself upon, made the Brethren a little silent, and the strains of certain music had not yet lifted from them.

"There are just two pieces that ought to be barred for ever," said a Brother as we were sitting down to the "banquet." "'Last Post' is the other."

"I can stand 'Last Post.' It's 'Tipperary' breaks me," another replied. "But I expect everyone carries his own firing-irons inside him."

I turned to look. It was a sponsor for one of our newly raised Brethren—a fat man with a fish-like and vacant face, but evidently prosperous. We introduced ourselves as we took our places. His name was Bevin, and he had a chicken farm near Chalfont-St.-Giles, whence he supplied, on yearly contract, two or three high-class London hotels. He was also, he said, on the edge of launching out into herb-growing.

"There's a demand for herbs," said he; "but it all depends upon your connexions with the wholesale dealers. *We* ain't systematic. The French do it much better, especially in those mountains on the Swiss an' Italy sides. They use more herbal remedies than we do. Our patent-medicine business has killed that with us. But there's a demand still, if your connexions are sound. I'm going in for it."

A large, well-groomed brother across the table (his name was Pole, and he seemed some sort of professional man) struck in with a detailed account of a hollow behind a destroyed village on the Somme, where, for no ascertainable reason, a certain rather scarce herb had sprung up out of the overturned earth, he said, by the acre.

"Only you've got to poke in among the weeds to find it, and there's any quantity of bombs an' stuff knockin' about there still. They haven't cleaned it up yet."

"Last time *I* saw the place," said Bevin, "I thought it 'ud be that way till Judgment Day. You know how it lay in that dip under that beet-factory. I saw it bombed up level in two days—into brick dust mainly. They were huntin' for St. Firmin Dump." He reached for a sandwich and munched slowly, wiping his face, for the night was close.

"Ye-es," said Pole. "The trouble is there hasn't been any judgment taken or executed. That's why the

* In the Interests of the Brethren.

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world is where it is now. We didn't need anything but justice—afterwards. Not gettin' that, the bottom fell out of things, naturally."

"That's how I look at it too," Bevin replied. "We didn't want all that talk afterwards—we only wanted justice. What *I* say is, there *must* be a right and a wrong to things. It can't all be kiss-an'-make-friends, no matter what you do."

A thin, dark brother on my left, who had been attending to a cold pork pie (there are no pork pies to equal ours, for Brother Lemming, of Lemming and Orton, the print sellers, breeds the pigs at his little place in Berkshire), suddenly lifted his long head, in which a pale blue glass eye swivelled insanely.

"Well," he said slowly. "*My* motto is 'Never again.' Ne-ver again for me."

"Same here—till next time," said Pole, across the table. "You're from Sidney, ain't you?"

"How d'you know?" was the short answer.

"You spoke." The other smiled. So did Mr. Bevin, who added: "*I* know how your push talk, well enough. Have you started that Republic of yours down under yet?"

"No. But we're goin' to. *Then* you'll see."

"Carry on. No one's hindering," Bevin pursued.

The Australian scowled. "No. We know they ain't. And—and—that's what makes us all so crazy angry with you." He threw back his head and laughed the spleen out of him. "What *can* you do with an Empire that—that don't care what you do?"

"I've heard that before," Bevin laughed, and his fat sides shook. "Oh, I know *your* push inside out."

"When did you come across us? My name's Orton—no relation to the Tichborne case."

"Gallip'li—dead mostly. My battalion began there. We only lost half."

"Lucky! They gambled *us* away in two days. 'Member the hospital on the beach?" asked Orton.

"Yes. An' the man without the face—preaching," said Bevin, sitting up a little.

"Till he died," said the Australian, his voice lowered.

"*And* afterwards," Bevin added, lower still.

"Christ! Were *you* there that night?"

Bevin nodded. The Australian choked off something he was going to say, as a brother on his left claimed him. I heard them talk horses, while Bevin developed his herb-growing projects with the well-groomed brother opposite.

At the end of the banquet, when pipes were drawn, the Australian addressed himself to Bevin, across me, and as the company rearranged itself, we three came to anchor in the big anteroom where the best prints are hung. Here our brother across the table joined us, and moored alongside, beneath the portraits of Peter Gilkes and Barton Wilson, the Fathers, as we know, of "Emulation" working.

The Australian was full of racial grievance, as must be in a young country; alternating between complaints that his people had not been appreciated enough in England, or too fulsomely complimented by an hysterical Press.

"No-o," Pole drawled, after awhile. "You're altogether wrong. We hadn't time to notice anything—we were all too busy fightin' for our lives. What your crowd down under are suffering from is growing-pains. You'll get over 'em in three hundred years or so—if you're allowed to last so long."

"Who's going to stoush us?" Orton asked fiercely.

This turned the talk again to larger issues and possibilities—delivered on both sides straight from the shoulder without malice or heat, between bursts of song from round the piano at the far end. Bevin and I sat out, watching.

"Well, *I* don't understand these

matters," said Bevin at last. "They're too high for me. But I'd hate to have one of your crowd have it in for me for anything."

"Would you? Why?" Orton pierced him with his pale, artificial eye.

"Well, you're a trifle—what's the word?—vindictive?—spiteful? At least, that's what *I've* found. I expect it comes from drinking stewed tea with meat four times a day," said Bevin. "No! I'd hate to have an Australian after me for anything in particular."

Out of this came his tale—somewhat in this shape:

It opened with an Australian of the name of Hickmot or Hickmer—Bevin called him both—who, finding his battalion completely expended at Gallipoli, had joined up with what stood of Bevin's battalion, and had there remained, unrebuked and unnoticed. The point that Bevin laboured was that the man had never seen a table-cloth, a china plate, or a dozen white people together till, in his thirtieth year, he had walked for two months to Brisbane to join up. Pole found this hard to believe.

"But it's true," Bevin insisted. "This chap was born an' bred among the black fellers, as they call 'em, two hundred miles from the nearest town, four hundred miles from a railway, an' ten thousand from the grace o' God—out in Queensland near some desert."

"Why, of course. We come out of everywhere," said Orton. "What's wrong with that?"

"Yes—but—— Look here! From the time that man Hickmot was twelve years old he'd ridden, driven—what's the word?—conducted sheep for his father for thousands of miles on end, an' months at a time, alone with these black fellers that you daren't show the back of your neck to—else they knock your head in. That was all that he'd ever done till he joined up. He—he—didn't *belong* to anything in the world, you understand. And he didn't strike other men as being a—a human being."

"Why? He was only a Queensland drover. They're all right," Orton explained.

"I dare say; but—well, a man notices another man, don't he? *You'd* notice if there was a man standing or sitting or lyin' near you, wouldn't you? So'd anyone. But you'd never notice Hickmot. His bein' anywhere about wouldn't stay in your mind. He just didn't draw attention any more than anything else that happened to be about. Have you got it?"

"Wasn't he any use at his job?" Pole inquired.

"I've nothing against him that way, an' I'm—I was his platoon sergeant. He wouldn't volunteer specially for any doings, but he'd slip out with the party and he'd slip back with what was left of 'em. No one noticed him, and he never opened his mouth about any doings. You'd think a man who had lived the way he'd lived among black fellers an' sheep would be noticeable enough in an English battalion, wouldn't you?"

"It teaches us to lie close; but *you* seem to have noticed him," Orton interposed, with a little suspicion.

"Not at the time—but afterwards. If he was noticeable it was on account of his *un*noticeability—same way you'd notice there not being an extra step at the bottom of the staircase when you thought there was."

"Ye-es," Pole assented suddenly. "It's the eternal mystery of personality. 'God before Whom ever lie bare——' Some people can occlude their personality like turning off a tap. I beg your pardon. Carry on!"

"Granted," said Bevin, warming to it. "I think I catch your drift. I used to think I was a student of human nature before I joined up."

"What was your job—before?" Orton asked.

"Oh, I was *the* young blood of the village. Goal-keeper in our

soccer team, secretary of the local cricket and rifle—oh, lor'!—clubs. Yes, an' village theatricals. My father was the chemist in the village. *How* I did talk! *What* I did know in my babyhood!" He beamed upon us all.

"*I* don't mind hearing you talk," said Orton, lying back in his chair. "You're a little different from some of 'em. What happened to this dam' drover of yours?"

"He was with our push for the rest of the war—an' I don't think he ever sprung a dozen words at one time. With his upbringing, you see, there wasn't any subject that any man knew about he *could* open up on. He kept quiet, and mixed with his backgrounds. If there was a lump of dirt, or a hole in the ground, or what was—was left after anythin' had happened, it would be Hickmot. That was all he wanted to be."

"A camouflager?" Orton suggested.

"You have it! He was the complete camouflager all through. That's him to a dot. Look here! He hadn't even a nickname in his platoon. And then a friend of mine from our village, of the name of Vigors, came out with a draft. Bert Vigors. As a matter of fact, I was engaged to his sister. And Bert hadn't been with us a week before they called him 'The Grief.' His father was an oldish man, a market-gardener—high-class vegetables, bit o' glass, an'—an' all the rest of it. Do you know anything about that particular business?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," said Pole, "except that glass is expensive, and your man always sells cut flowers."

"Then you *do* know something about it. It is. Bert was the old man's only son, an'—*I* don't blame him—he'd done his damnedest to get exempted—for the sake of the business, you understand. But he caught it all right. The tribunal wasn't takin' any the day he went up. Bert was for it, with a few remarks from the patriotic old was-sers on the bench. Our county paper had 'em all."

"That's the thing that made one really want the Hun in England for a week or two," said Pole.

"*Mwor osee!* The same tribunal, havin' copped Bert, gave unconditional exemption to the opposition shop—a man called Margetts, in the market-garden business, which he'd established *since* the war, with his two sons who, every one in the village knew, had been pushed into the business to save their damned hides. But Margetts had a good lawyer to advise him. The whole case was frank and aboveboard to a degree—our county paper had it all in too. Agricultural produce—vital necessity; the plough mightier than the sword; an' those ducks on the bench, who had turned down Bert, noddin' and smilin' at Margetts, all full of his cabbage and green peas. What happened? The usual. Vigors' business—he's sixty-eight, with asthma—goes smash, and Margetts and Co. double theirs. So, then, that was Bert's grievance, an' he joined us full of it. That's why they called him 'The Grief.' Knowing the facts, I was with him; but being his sergeant, I had to check him, because grievances are catchin', and three or four men with 'em make Companies—er—sticky. Luckily Bert wasn't handy with his pen. He had to cork up his grievance mostly till he came across Hickmot, an' Gord in Heaven knows what brought those two together. No! *As* y'were. I'm wrong about God! I always am. It was Sheep. Bert knew's much about sheep as I do—an' that's Canterbury lamb—but he'd let Hickmot talk about 'em for hours, in return for Hickmot listenin' to his grievance. Hickmot 'ud talk sheep—the one created thing he'd ever open up on—an' Bert 'ud talk his grievance while they was waiting to go over the top. I've heard 'em again an' again, and, of course, I encouraged 'em. Now,

look here! Hickmot hadn't seen an English house or a field or a road or —or anything any civ'lized man is used to in all his life! Sheep an' blacks! Market-gardens an' glass an' exemption tribunals! An' the men's teeth chatterin' behind their masks between rum-issue an' zero. Oh, there was fun in Hell those days, wasn't there, boys?"

"Sure! Oh, sure!" Orton chuckled, and Pole echoed him.

"Look here! When we were lying up somewhere among those forsaken chicken-camps back o' Doullens, I found Hickmot making mud pies in a farmyard an' Bert lookin' on. He'd made a model of our village according to Bert's description of it. He'd preserved it in his head through all those weeks an' weeks o' Bert's yap; an' he'd coughed it all up—Margetts' house and gardens, old Mr. Vigors' ditto; both pubs; my father's shop, everything that he'd been told by Bert done out to scale in mud, with bits o' brick and stick. Haig ought to have seen it; but as his sergeant I had to check him for misusin' his winkle-pin on dirt. 'Come to think of it, a man who runs about uninhabited countries with sheep for a livin' must have gifts for mappin' and scalin' things, or he'd be dead. *I* never saw anything like it—*all* out o' what Bert had told him by word of mouth. An' the next time we went up the line Hickmot copped it in the leg just in front of me."

"Finish?" I asked.

"Oh, no. Only beginnin'. That was in December, somethin' or other, '16. In Jan'ry Vigors copped it for keeps. I buried him—snowin' blind it was—an' before we'd got him under the whole show was crumped. I wanted to bury him again just to spite 'em (I'm a spiteful man by nature), but the burial party wasn't takin' any more—even if they could have found it. But, you see, we *had* buried him all right, which is what they want at home, and I wrote the usual trimmin's about the chaplain an' the full service, an' what his captain had said about Bert bein' recommended for a pip, an' the irreparable loss an' so on. That was in Jan'ry, '17. In Feb'ry some time or other I got saved. My speciality had come to be bombin's and night-doings. Very pleasant for a young free man, but —there's a limit to what you can stand. It takes all men differently. Noise was what started me, at last. I'd got just up to the edge—wonderin' when I'd crack an' how many of our men I'd do in if it came on me while we were busy. I had that nice taste in the mouth and the nice temperature they call trench-fever, an'—I had to feel inside my head for the meanin' of every order I gave or was responsible for executin'. *You* know!"

"We do. Go on!" said Pole in a tone that made Orton look at him.

"So, you see, the bettin' was even on my drawin' a V.C. or getting Number Umpty rest-camp or—a firing party before breakfast. But Gord saved me. (I made friends with Him the last two years of the war. The others went off too quick.) They wanted a bombin' instructor for the training battalion at home, an' He put it into their silly hearts to indent for me. It took 'em five minutes to make me understand I was saved. Then I vomited, an' then I cried. *You* know!" The fat face of Bevin had changed and grown drawn, even as he spoke, and his hands tugged as though to tighten an imaginary belt.

"I was never keen on bombin' myself," said Pole. "But bombin' instruction's murder!"

"I don't deny it's a shade risky, specially when they take the pin out an' start shakin' it, same as the Chinks used to do in the woods at Beauty, when they were cuttin' 'em down. But you live like a home defence Brigadier, besides week-end leaf. As a matter o' fact, I married Bert's sister soon's I could after I got the billet, an' I used to lie in our bed thinkin' of the old crowd

on the Somme an'—feelin' what a swine I was. Of course, I earned two V.C.'s a week behind the traverse in the exercise of my ord'nary duties, but that isn't the same thing. An' yet I'd only joined up because—because I couldn't dam' well help it."

"An' what about your Queenslander?" the Australian asked.

"*Too de sweet! Pronto!* We got a letter in May from a Brighton hospital matron, sayin' that one of the name of Hickmer was anxious for news o' me, previous to proceedin' to Roehampton for initiation into his new leg. Of course, we applied for him by return. Bert had written about him to his sister—my missus—every time he wrote at all; an' any pal o' Bert's—well, *you* know what the ladies are like. I warned her about his peculiarities. She wouldn't believe till she saw him. He was just the same. You'd ha' thought he'd show up in England like a fresh stiff on snow—but you never noticed him. You never heard him; and if he didn't want to be seen he wasn't there. He just joined up with his background. I knew he could do that with men; but how in Hell, seein' how curious women are, he could camouflage with the ladies—my wife an' my mother to wit—beats *me!* He'd feed the chickens for us; he'd stand on his one leg—it was off above the knee—and saw wood for us; he'd run—I mean he'd hop—errands for Mrs. B. or mother; our dog worshipped him from the start, though I never saw him throw a word to him; and—*yet* he didn't take any place anywhere. You've seen a rabbit—you've seen a pheasant—hidin' in a ditch? 'Put your hand on it sometimes before it moved, haven't you? Well, that was Hickmot—with two women in the house crazy to find out—find out—anything about him that made him human. *You* know what women are! He stayed with us a fortnight. He left us on a Sat'day to go to Roehampton to try his leg. On Friday he came over to the bombin' ground—not sayin' anything, as usual—to watch me instruct my Suicide Club, which was only half an hour's run by rail from our village. He had his overcoat on, an' as soon as he reached the place it was *mafeesh* with him, as usual. Rabbit-trick again! You never noticed him. He sat in the bomb-proof behind the pit where the duds accumulate till it's time to explode 'em. Naturally, that's strictly forbidden to the public. So he went there, an' no one noticed him. When he'd had enough of watchin', he hopped off home to feed our chickens for the last time."

"Then how did *you* know all about it?" Orton said.

"Because I saw him come into the place just as I was goin' down into the trench. Then he slipped my memory till my train went back. But it would have made no difference what our arrangements were. If Hickmer didn't choose to be noticed, he *wasn't* noticed. Just for curiosity's sake I asked some o' the Staff Sergeants whether they'd seen him on the ground. Not one—not one single one had—or could tell me what he was like. An' Sat'day noon he went off to Roehampton. We saw him into the train ourselves, with the lunch Mrs. B. had put up for him—a one-legged man an' his crutch, in regulation blue, khaki warm an' kit-bag. Takin' everything together, per'aps he'd spoken as many as twenty times in the thirteen days he'd been with us. I'm givin' it you straight as it happened. An' now—look here!—this is what *did* happen.

"Between two and three that Sunday morning—dark an' blowin' from the north—I was woke up by an explosion an' people shoutin' 'Raid!' The first bang fetched 'em out like worms after rain. There was another some minutes afterwards, an' me an' a Sergeant in the Shropshires on leaf told 'em all to take cover. They did. There was a devil of a long wait an' there was

a third pop. Everybody, includin' me, heard aeroplanes. I didn't notice till afterwards that——"

Bevin paused.

"What?" said Orton.

"Oh, I noticed a heap of things afterwards. What we noticed first—the Shropshire Sergeant an' me—was a rick well alight back o' Margetts' house, an', with that north wind, blowin' straight on to another rick o' Margetts'. It went up all of a whoosh. The next thing we saw by the light of it was Margetts' house with a bomb-hole in the roof and the rafters leanin' sideways like—like they always lean on such occasions. So we ran there, and the first thing we met was Margetts in his split-tailed nightie callin' on his mother an' damnin' his wife. A man always does that when he's cross. Have you noticed? Mrs. Margetts was in her nightie too, remindin' Margetts that he hadn't completed his rick insurance. An' that's a woman's lovin' care all over. Behind them was their eldest son, in trousers an' slippers, nursin' his arm an' callin' for the doctor. They went through us howlin' like *flammenwerfer* casualties—right up the street to the surgery.

"Well, there wasn't anything to do except let the show burn out. We hadn't any means of extinguishing conflagrations. Some of 'em fiddled with buckets, an' some of 'em tried to get out some o' Margetts' sticks, but his younger son kept shoutin', 'Don't! Don't! It'll be stole! It'll be stole!' So it burned instead, till the roof came down top of all—a little, cheap, dirty villa. In *reel* life one whizbang would have shifted it; but in our civil village it looked that damned important and particular you wouldn't believe. We couldn't get round to Margetts' stable because of the two ricks alight, but we found someone had opened the door early an' the horses was in Margetts' new vegetable piece down the hill which he'd hired off old Vigors to extend his business with. I love the way a horse always looks after his own belly—same as a Gunner. They went to grazin' down the carrots and onions till young Margetts ran down to turn 'em out, an' then they got in among the glass frames an' cut themselves. Oh, we had a regular Russian night of it, everybody givin' advice an' fallin' over each other. When it got light we saw the damage. House, two ricks an' stable *mafeesh;* the big glasshouse with every pane smashed and the furnace-end of it blown clean out.

"All the horses an' about fifteen head o' cattle—butcher's stores from the next field—feeding in the new vegetable piece. It was a fair clean-out from end to end—house, furniture, fittin's, plant, an' all the early crops."

"Was there any other damage in the village?" I asked.

"I'm coming to it—the curious part—but I wouldn't call it damage. I was renting a field then for my chickens off the Merecroft Estate. It's accommodation land, an' there was a wet ditch at the bottom that I had wanted for ever so long to dam up to make a swim-hole for Mrs. Bevin's ducks."

"Ah!" said Orton, half turning in his chair, all in one piece.

"S'pose I was allowed? Not me. Their Agent came down on me for tamperin' with the Estate's drainage arrangements. An' all I wanted was to bring the bank down where the ditch narrows—a couple of cartloads of dirt would have held the water back for half a dozen yards—not more, give you my word, an' I could have made a little spillway over the top with three boards—same as in the trenches. Well, the first bomb—the one that woke me up—had done my work for me better than I could. It had dropped just under the hollow of the bank an' brought it all down in a fair landslide. I'd got my swim-hole for Mrs. Bevin's ducks, an' I didn't see how the Estate could kick at the Act o' God, d'you?"

"And Hickmot?" said Orton, grinning.

"Hold on! There was a Parish Council meetin' to demand reprisals, of course, an' there was the policeman an' me pokin' about among the ruins till the Explosives Expert came down in his motor car at three p.m. Monday, an' he meets all the Margetts off their rockers, howlin' in the surgery, an' he sees my swim-hole fillin' up to the brim."

"What did he say?" Pole inquired.

"He sized it up at once. (He had to get back to dine in town that evening.) He said all the evidence proved that it was a lucky shot on the part of one isolated Hun 'plane goin' home, an' we weren't to take it to heart. I don't know that anybody but the Margetts did. He said they must have used incendiary bombs of a new type—which he'd suspected for a long time. I don't think the man was anything worse than God intended him to be. I don't *reelly*. But the Shropshire Sergeant said——"

"And what did *you* think?" I cut in.

"I didn't think. I knew by then. I'm not a Sherlock Holmes; but havin' chucked 'em an' chucked 'em back and kicked 'em out of the light an' slept with 'em for two years, an' makin' my livin' out of them at that time, I could recognize the fuse of a Mills bomb when I found it. I found all three of 'em. Curious about that second in Margetts' glasshouse. Hickmot mus' have raked the ashes out of the furnace, popped it in, an' shut the furnace door. It operated all right. Not one livin' pane left in the putty, and all the brickwork spread round the yard in streaks. Just like that St. Firmin village we were talking about."

"But how d'you account for young what's-his-name gettin' his arm broken?" said Pole.

"Crutch!" said Bevin. "If you or me had taken on that night's doin's, with one leg, we'd have hopped and sweated from one flank to another an' been caught half-way between. Hickmot didn't. I'm as sure as I'm sittin' here that he did his doings quiet and comfortable at his full height—he was over six feet—and no one noticed him. This is the way *I* see it. He fixed the swim-hole for Mrs. Bevin's ducks first. We used to talk over our own affairs in front of him, of course, and he knew just what she wanted in the way of a pond; so he went and made it at his leisure. Then he prob'ly went over to Margetts' and lit the first rick, knowin' that the north wind 'ud do the rest. When young Margetts saw the light of it an' came out to look, Hickmot would have taken post at the back-door an' dropped the young swine with his crutch, same as we used to drop Huns comin' out of a dug-out. *You* know how they blink at the light? Then he must have walked off an' opened Margetts' stable door to save the horses. They'd be more to him than any man's life. Then he prob'ly chucked one bomb on top o' Margetts' roof, havin' seen that the first rick had caught the second and that the whole house was bound to go. D'you get me?"

"Then why did he waste his bomb on the house?" said Orton. His glass eye seemed as triumphant as his real one.

"For camouflage, of course. He was camouflagin' an air-raid. When the Margetts piled out of their place into the street, he prob'ly attended to the glasshouse, because that would be Margetts' chief means o' business. After that—I think so, because otherwise I don't see where all those extra cattle came from that we found in the vegetable piece—he must have walked off an' rounded up all the butcher's beasts in the next medder, an' driven 'em there to help the horses. And when he'd finished everything he'd set out to do, I'll lay my life an' kit he curled up like a bloomin' wombat not fifty yards away from the whole

flamin' show—an' let us run round him. An' when he'd had his sleep out, he went up to Roehampton Monday mornin' by some train that he'd decided upon in his own mind weeks an' weeks before."

"Did he know all the trains then?" said Pole.

"Ask me another. I only know that if he wanted to get from any place to another without bein' noticed, he did it."

"And the bombs? He got 'em from you, of course," Pole went on.

"What do *you* think? He was an hour in the park watchin' me instruct, sittin', as I remember, in the bomb-proof by the dud-hole, in his overcoat. He got 'em all right. He took neither more nor less than he wanted; an' I've told you what he did with 'em—one—two—*an'* three."

"'Ever see him afterwards?" said Orton, illuminated with delight.

"Yes. 'Saw him at Brighton when I went down there with the missus, not a month after he'd been broken in to his Roehampton leg. You know how the boys used to sit all along Brighton front in their blues, an' jump every time the coal was bein' delivered to the hotels behind them. I barged into him opposite the Old Ship, an' I told him about our air-raid. I told him how Margetts had gone off his rocker an' walked about starin' at the sky an' holdin' reprisal-meetin's all by himself; an' how old Mr. Vigors had bought in what he'd left—tho' of course I said what *was* left—o' Margetts' business; an' how well my swim-hole for the ducks was doin'. It didn't interest him. He didn't want to come over to stay with us any more, either. We were a long, long way back in his past. You could see that. He wanted to get back with his new leg, to his own God-forsaken sheep-walk an' his black fellers in Queensland. I expect he's done it now, an' no one has noticed him. But, by Gord!"

Bevin suddenly slipped his fat smooth fist on his knee. "He *did* leak a little at the end. He did that much! When we was waitin' for the tram to the station, I said how grateful I was to Fritz for moppin' up Margetts an' makin' our swim-hole all in one night. Mrs. B. seconded the motion. We couldn't have done less. Well, then Hickmot said, speakin' in his queer way, as if English words were all new to him: 'Ah, go on an' bail up in Hell,' he says. 'Bert was my friend.' That was all. I've given it you just as it happened, word for word. *I'd* hate to have an Australian have it in for *me* for anything I'd done to his friend. Mark *you*, I don't say there's anything *wrong* with you Australians, Brother Orton. I only say they ain't like us or anyone else that I know."

"Well, do you want us to be?" said Orton, with his thin-lipped smile.

"No, no. It takes all sorts to make a world, as the sayin' is. And now"—Bevin pulled out his gold watch—"if I don't make a move of it I'll miss my last train."

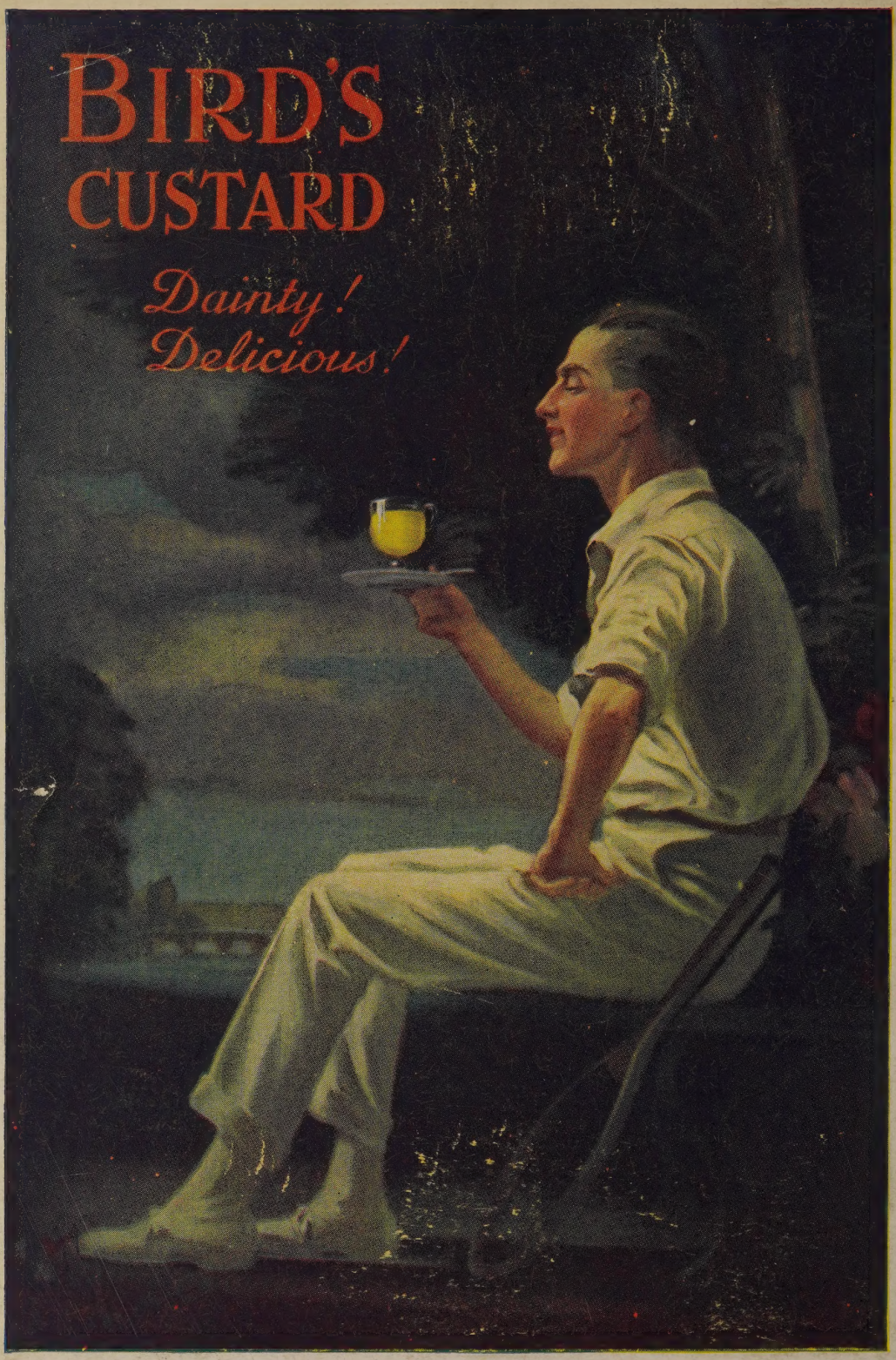
"Let her go," said Orton serenely. "You've done some lorry-hoppin' in your time, haven't you—Sergeant?"

"When I was two an' a half stone lighter, Digger," Bevin smiled in reply.

"Well, I'll run you out home before sun-up. I'm a haulage-contractor now—London and Oxford. There's an empty of mine ordered to Oxford. We can go round by Aylesbury as easy as not. She's lyin' out Vauxhall way."

"My Gord! An' see the sun rise again! 'Haven't seen him since I can't remember when," said Bevin, chuckling. "Oh, there was fun sometimes in Hell, wasn't there, Australia?" and again his hands went down to tighten the belt that was missing.

RUDYARD KIPLING.



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